

Gorbachev Drops Bar On Multiple Parties

End to Communist Monopoly No 'Tragedy'

Romania Reverses Party Ban

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Foreign Service

BUCHAREST, Romania, Jan. 13—Acting Romanian President Ion Iliescu tonight reversed his provisional government's decision to ban the Communist Party and said the party's future would be decided in a nationwide referendum later this month that would also determine whether capital punishment is reinstated.

In an evening television broadcast, Iliescu said he and other revolutionary leaders of the governing National Salvation Front had made "hasty decisions" that put "the democratic spirit of the front in an unfavorable light" by declaring Friday night that the Communist Party had been outlawed.

The ban on the party had been announced as Iliescu and other government leaders confronted angry crowds, who besieged the front's headquarters demanding the ouster of Communist officials participating in the provisional government and the reinstatement of the death penalty.

Iliescu, a former high-ranking and then demoted Communist who assumed leadership of the group of former officials who declared themselves in control of the government when Romanian dic-

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By David Remnick
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VILNIUS, U.S.S.R., Jan. 13—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev expressed a willingness today to accept a multi-party system in the Soviet Union, saying an end to the Communist Party's monopoly on power would not be a "tragedy."

"We should not be afraid of a multi-party system the way the devil is afraid of incense," Gorbachev said as he ended a tense, three-day mission to Lithuania. He appeared to have failed in his attempts here to persuade the republic's Communists to end their split with Moscow or to get Lithuanians to temper demands for outright independence.

"I don't see a tragedy in a multi-party system if it serves the people," he said in a contentious four-hour meeting with leaders of Lithuania's Communist Party. He added, however, that a multi-party system should "not be artificially imposed" on the state and that the "main thing is not whether there is one party or two parties but the level of democratization and *glasnost*," or openness.

Gorbachev's statements today came in response to a shouted question from the floor and were the clearest indication yet of his increasing flexibility on one of the most basic issues of political reform.

A year ago Gorbachev called the idea of a multi-party system in the Soviet Union "rubbish." More recently, as new parties have formed in some Soviet republics and as Communist regimes in Eastern Europe have lost power, he has spoken and written about the need for retaining the one-party system "for now."

Since last month, when the Lithuanian government defied Moscow and amended its constitution to end the Communist monopoly in this

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Slavic-Turkish strife. Page A26

Gorbachev Drops Bar to Other Parties

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republic, political activists have organized several opposition parties. Legislative elections here, scheduled for Feb. 24, will be the first multi-party contest the Soviet Union has seen in seven decades.

In his remarks today, Gorbachev sought to provide historical legitimacy for a multi-party system in the Soviet Union, recalling that just after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution there were still Socialist Revolutionaries and other political parties. "Lenin and the Bolsheviks were not afraid of that," he said, but failed to mention that it was Vladimir Lenin himself who in 1918 forcibly dissolved the multi-party legislature after the Bolsheviks lost a nationwide election.

Vladimir Medvedev, the Soviet Politburo's chief ideologist, denied that there was any direct correlation between the number of parties in a society and its level of political freedom. "You can have many parties and [a] totalitarian system at the same time," he said in a news conference after the meeting. "Our Communist Party will do everything it can to speed democratization."

The Soviet constitution guarantees the Communist Party the "leading role" in public life, but many legislators and independent political groups have waged a campaign to eliminate that statute. All six East European countries that were tied to Moscow have ended the Communists' constitutional monopoly.

If Gorbachev's mission to Lithuania was intended above all to persuade people here that they should abandon plans and ambitions for a wholly independent Lithuania, then it is likely that he has failed. Gorbachev's frustration was especially evident as he faced the Lithuanian Communists who broke with Moscow last month.

"Think a thousand times before embarking on an independent drift without a compass, a map, reserves of fuel or a competent crew," Gorbachev said. "You cannot just drop people on an iceberg and say, 'Here, go ahead and swim.'"

Medvedev said events and public opinion in Lithuania had "speeded up" the drafting of a national law on procedures by which Soviet republics might secede from the union. "This law will show that the right to self-determination is not just an empty phrase," he said. "But also the law must foresee all the problems linked to that right," including questions of economic compensation to Moscow, citizenship and ethnic minorities.

Gorbachev also appeared frustrated in his attempt to convince the Lithuanian Communist Party to reverse its decision to break with Moscow saying that it was a blow to his *perestroika* reforms and to his own political position. At times he appeared tired and angry, and even lashed out at Lithuanian Communist Party leader Algirdas Brazauskas.

He also argued that the independence movement Sajudis was dominated by "romantic" professors who "exclude the people from the process." He was furious with one speaker who said that the Soviet leader came to Lithuania and "gave his views but did not listen."

Brazauskas remained unflinching in his defense of the party's decision to split with Moscow. "We did comprehensive analyses in the republic and the report showed that only an independent Communist Party had any chance to win the trust of the Lithuanian people and remain a serious political force," he said, adding that the central party organization "had not changed anything."

In his speech, Gorbachev turned to Brazauskas and said, "This party began *perestroika*, and if it had not, we would not even be here today discussing such things."

Gorbachev continually argued that an independent Lithuania would hurt itself economically and would damage the future and security of the entire Soviet Union. He said that Lithuanians were still going through a "period of euphoria" and urged them to "think it all through."

He said: "You have all kinds of conceptions, but after conceptions there is politics, life and reality . . . You will not find absolute independence anywhere."

Kazimiera Prunskiene, a member of the republic's Politburo and the Sajudis leadership, said: "It is our right even to make mistakes. This is our future." She said she hoped that an independent Lithuania would become an economic "corridor" between the Soviet Union and the rest of Europe.

"I have talked of a common [European] home," Gorbachev cracked. "Comrade Prunskiene would say that I am now standing out in the corridor."



President Gorbachev confers with Lithuanian Communist Party chief Algirdas Brazauskas during meeting in Vilnius.